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LATIN AS A VOCATIONAL STUDY IN THE COMMERCIAL COURSE¹

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In a paper read at the meeting of the Eastern Massachusetts section of the Classical Association of New England two years ago,² I described the circumstances which resulted in putting vocational Latin into the commercial course in the Dorchester High School. In that paper I indicated what we hoped to do; today it is my purpose to outline briefly what has been accomplished during the two and a half years this course has been in operation in the school.

Fortunately for the success of the experiment, the headmaster of the Dorchester High School, Mr. James E. Thomas, earnest advocate of sound vocational studies that he is, has given the commercial Latin his most hearty support. Furthermore, Mr. W. L. Anderson, head of the commercial department, who, by the way, was the first to suggest to me the idea of such a course, not only knows from personal experience the value of Latin to a commercial education, but from a wide observation extending over many years appreciates the seriousness of the handicap in the competition of life placed upon those who have never studied the language.

Many, on general principles, would admit, I think, the importance of such a course to stenographers; but we contend that, even to a greater degree, salesmen and business men, generally, need the help to be derived from Latin. Miss Blanchard, the teacher of salesmanship in the Dorchester High School, who also has an evening class in business administration composed of employees in Filene's store, goes even farther; she states that it is found in the work downtown that the chief obstacle to promotion is ignorance of English; that is, lack of knowledge of the meaning and use of words derived from the Latin. To quote Miss Blanchard: "The

¹ Read at the ninth annual meeting of the Classical Association of New England, April, 1914.

² "Latin as a 'Practical' Study," *Classical Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. 7, April, 1913.

success of a salesman or business man is found, in actual practice, to be directly proportional, on the one hand, to ability to understand what the other man has to say, and on the other hand, to ability to convince him of the superiority of the goods offered for sale, or the advantage connected with the business proposition in hand." In short, other things being equal, it is vocabulary which holds the key to success. This fact is recognized by the educational department at Filene's, and, as a result, every night the members of the evening classes bring in, for explanation and study, lists of words they have heard during the day, but have not understood. These words, sometimes amounting to as many as forty, are almost entirely of Latin origin. Thus, you see, we are confronted not with a theory, but with a condition, as it actually exists in the fierce competition of the business world of today.

But in the Dorchester High School the so-called commercial Latin is not confined to commercial students, for, much to my gratification, about a year ago, Miss Ripley, the teacher in charge of the department of dressmaking and millinery in the school, after going over the matter with the headmaster and her former instructors in Columbia University, decided to put commercial, or vocational, Latin into the domestic art course. Miss Ripley sums up the case for Latin as follows:

The best situations which my girls may reasonably hope to obtain are those of business manager, workroom manager, draper, fitter, or perhaps a combination of two or more of these positions. It has been said that it is only necessary to "fit" the mind of customers to achieve success in the sewing trades. Hence a broad, flexible, discriminating vocabulary is a prime business asset. In my opinion, the time is coming to an end when the crude, uneducated tradeswoman can succeed. A training which enlarges the vocabulary and impresses on the mind a discriminating use of words is especially beneficial to girls who hear poor English spoken at home, and whose life work will bring them in contact with illiterate workers, on the one hand, and a cultivated and refined public, on the other.

Two years ago last September we began the experiment of commercial Latin with one division of forty. This year there were four sections, including Latin II, numbering in all about 165 pupils.

The work is much the same as in other Latin classes, with two exceptions: syntax is studied only to the extent of making clear

the meaning of what is read, and lists of English derivatives are made from every available Latin word met in the course. These derivatives are classified as to parts of speech, defined, and later embodied in sentences composed by the pupils. The number of derivatives in most cases is surprisingly large. Few Latin words yield less than half a dozen, some as many as 60 or 70, while *facio* yielded 169, and *sto* the astonishing number of 185.

In my first paper I gave a list of reference books used in the course. In actual practice, however, we find Webster's *Academic Dictionary*, a book supplied to all students by the English department, amply sufficient. The pupils begin with the root or base of the Latin word, and then run through with the prefixes. For example, in *scribo*, *scriptus*, *scribere*, *scripsi*, they find what they can in the English dictionary from the two stems, *scrib* and *script*, and then hunt up other words, taking the prefixes in alphabetical order. We thus lay much stress upon prefixes; and as a matter of fact after a few months have a typewritten list of them pasted on the inside of the cover of the notebook for easy reference in looking up derivatives. Just here is a point. Since in the study of stenography many of the Latin prefixes and suffixes, and not a few Latin words, are represented by definite phonographic signs, the commercial pupils who have studied Latin, when they come to phonography in the third and fourth years, have a distinct advantage. In fact, this year, five or six fourth-year commercial pupils, who had not had my training, entered the Latin class, primarily that they might master these phonographic signs with greater facility.

Occasionally in the work of the class I have pupils take sentences containing derivatives from specified Latin words in their textbooks in commercial geography, commercial law, or history of commerce, and have myself been surprised to note how many words of Latin origin they invariably find.

At the beginning of the experiment in commercial Latin I was advised by not a few well-meaning people to go back to the old English pronunciation. On general principles, but somewhat doubtfully, I began with the Roman method, and now after a trial of over two years I have found that pupils not only experience no

difficulty with the Roman pronunciation in their study of derivation, but strangely enough, in not a few cases, are actually helped by it. For example, in Latin words containing *s* followed by *c*, as *discipulus* and *disciplina*, the hard sound of *c* serves naturally to fix the presence of that letter in such derivatives as *disciple* and *discipline*. Again, the pronunciation of the diphthong *au* in the Roman way helps to keep pupils from spelling the derivatives “or,” as *augment*, from *augeo*, or *auricle*, from *auris*, *ear*, through the diminutive *auricula*.

After finishing the beginners' book, the pupils take up *Gradatim* and *Gate to Caesar*, and then read selections from the *Gallie War*. Somewhat to my surprise we found Caesar not especially fruitful in words leading to English derivatives; so only a little was studied. Instead, we turned to Greenough, D'Ooge, and Daniell's *Second Year Latin*, and read some of the shorter selections, including the *Roman Maiden*, the *Haunted House*, and most of the poems on pp. 86-93. This point is reached about the first of January of the second year. Extracts from Ovid and Cicero are studied next, and we finish the work of the course by reading from the *Aeneid*, a little of books i, ii, and vi. Of course, the pupils are assisted in translating such difficult Latin, but with help beforehand, which we call “reading at sight,” and frequent reviews later, no serious difficulty is encountered.

From the beginning the pupils show a keen interest in the study of derivatives, but it is not until they are well along in the second year that they care much for the subject-matter read. This year, when they were studying Catullus' “Death of the Pet Sparrow,” from the *Second Year Latin*, which, by the way, was found to be unexpectedly rich in words leading to English derivatives, a genuine sense of literary appreciation manifested itself. All were deeply impressed, not merely by the beauty of the poem as a whole, but especially by such passages as the one beginning: “Who has now gone on the dark journey, whence they say no one ever comes back.”

A year ago this sense of appreciation was noticeable during the whole of the latter half of the year. In fact, the pupils followed the fate of Roscius of Ameria with almost breathless interest, and

when we read selections from the *Verrines* were astonished to discover that "graft" was by no means a modern development. But it was the study of Vergil which interested them most—to such a degree, indeed, that several read the whole of the *Aeneid* in translation. In other words, the pupils seemed so hungry for something spiritual, some relief, as it were, from the matter-of-fact detail of their bookkeeping or commercial geography, that I am inclined to think the refining influence of the literature is one of the important features of the course.

Perhaps, however, it is not wise to lay too much emphasis upon the cultural side of the work. This course in Latin must stand or fall according to the judgment passed upon it from the vocational viewpoint. In other words, it is necessary to establish as a fact that the vocabulary of the commercial Latin pupils is unquestionably enriched, and that this enrichment makes for increased earning capacity.

In this connection, allow me to quote from a letter which I received last year from Professor Holmes of the Division of Education of Harvard University, with reference to my first paper upon commercial Latin:

I think that you have struck in your work a new line of defense for Latin, which may prove of the utmost importance for the future of the study. There is only one thing, as I see it, that must yet be done to make the defense of Latin, on the score of practicality, completely convincing, namely, actual measurement of results. If it can be shown definitively and in detail, in recorded achievements of pupils, that their study of Latin has done more for them than some substitute for it has done for pupils of equal ability, then the whole discussion of Latin will be finished, once for all.

After receiving this letter I conferred with Miss Humphrey, head of the English department in the Dorchester High School, and in due time we decided upon a series of measurements. Obviously, the first step was to select two sets of pupils of equal ability, one set in the second year of Latin, and the other in the second year of a modern language. Accordingly, we chose pupils such that each group had virtually the same average mark in Latin, on the one hand, and modern language, on the other, and also in English, with the result, in actual figures, that the non-Latin group in the two

studies averaged 0.5 of 1 per cent the higher. To make doubly sure that the Latin pupils were not favored, the non-Latin group were taken from the section of Mr. Murdock, a classical scholar, who in his English teaching emphasizes the Latin element in the language. There were twenty-one pupils in each set, all in the second-year class of the school.

Five measurements were made, one in spelling, one in the use of words in sentences, the third in definitions and parts of speech, the fourth in the meaning of words and spelling, and the fifth in excellence in vocabulary.

Miss Humphrey selected the words in Nos. 1-4, and the subject in No. 5. In Nos. 1 and 2 the words were taken from the 600 or 800 derivatives in the notebooks of a fourth-year pupil of the class, who was excluded from the measurements. Moreover, to be fair to the non-Latin group, care was taken not to select words too difficult. In No. 3 the words were taken from the *Tale of Two Cities*, which the pupils of both groups were reading at the time in connection with their work in English II. Of the twenty words in No. 4, ten were taken from the *Tale of Two Cities* and ten from other sources. The subject in No. 5 was, "What I like to do best." The papers were marked by teachers in the English department and the results given to me. Altogether, six teachers of English assisted in the measurements.

To these five measurements is added a sixth—in my opinion most impressive of all. This test was made last June, shortly after I had received Professor Holmes's letter, by Miss Gormley, with her pupils in English II. As it happened, Miss Gormley, who was also the "home-room" teacher of all the pupils and consequently had access to their marks, in making up the two groups to be composed of pupils of equal ability, took into account not only foreign language and English II, as was the case in measurements 1-5, but also all studies the pupils had taken during the year. Hence we have even more reason in this case than in the others to assume that the pupils were of equal ability. In each set there were seventeen second-year students. The words were taken entirely from Franklin's *Autobiography* and *Silas Marner*, which all were reading at the time. The Latin pupils were selected from the first class I had had

in the subject, just as they were completing the course at the end of the second year.

The results of the six measurements were as follows:

	AVERAGES	
	Latin	Non-Latin
January and February, 1914—	per cent	per cent
1. Spelling.....	82.5	72.6
2. Use of words in sentences.....	57.5	40.6
3. Definitions and parts of speech.....	69.5	33.3
4. Meaning of words and spelling.....	57.0	27.5
5. Excellence in vocabulary.....	36.0	6.8
June, 1913—		
6. Meaning of words and spelling.....	65.3	12.3
	6) 367.8	6) 193.1
	61.3	32.18
	32.18	
Difference.....29.12 per cent	

In No. 1, the spelling measurement, the words were not difficult, but such as ordinary pupils of sixteen should know something about, whether they had studied Latin or not—as *valedictory*, *competition*, *occurrence*, *benevolence*, *legible*.

In No. 2, the pupils composed sentences containing the derivatives, some of which, in this measurement also, ought not to be unfamiliar to non-Latin pupils in their second year of English, as *impediment*, *advocate*, *reference*, *anticipate*, *subside*.

In the third measurement, the difference in the averages of the two groups—69.5 per cent and 33.3 per cent—was so great that Miss Humphrey thought that perhaps too difficult words had been selected, or at least words which placed the non-Latin students at an unreasonable disadvantage. Curiously enough, in this measurement the words were taken, not from the notebooks of a Latin pupil, as in the first two tests, in which the difference between the two groups was much less, but, as stated above, from the *Tale of Two Cities*. Furthermore, in No. 3, the non-Latin pupils were so far afield in giving accurate definitions, and so confused in classifying the words as to parts of speech, that it was decided to give another

test in which they should be asked, not to *define* words, but to give their meanings, with the parts of speech omitted entirely. The results in this measurement—57 per cent and 27.5 per cent—were virtually the same as in No. 3.

Since practically every second-year pupil could write at least passably on such a subject as "What I like to do best," it was decided to make the basis of comparison in No. 5, not the average of the two groups, but the percentage of rating above the passing mark. Moreover, in this vocabulary test, emphasis was laid, not merely upon words of Latin origin, but upon any words out of the ordinary, from whatever source. The wide difference in the results, from the viewpoint of excellence in vocabulary—36.0 per cent and 6.8 per cent—shows clearly what I have always believed and maintained, namely, that the work in commercial Latin necessarily gives the pupils the dictionary habit, the results of which extend far beyond the Latin derivatives actually studied.

Of all the measurements, No. 6 was perhaps the most convincing. In this test, the Latin pupils, unlike those in Nos. 1-5, had had during the last six months of the two years' course the benefit of drill in a vocabulary not in the commonest use and yet valuable and even necessary to educated people. The list of words was taken entirely from Franklin's *Autobiography* and *Silas Marner*, which the pupils had just read, and was not of unusual difficulty, consisting of such words, for example, as *asperity*, *promiscuous*, *mortuary*. Yet by referring to the results it will be seen that to the non-Latin group of pupils such words were practically meaningless.

An examination of the marks in this test may prove of interest. Among the seventeen non-Latin students the highest grade was 30 per cent, and five zeros were recorded. In the Latin group, on the other hand, the lowest mark was 30 per cent, while one pupil received 100 per cent, two 90 per cent, two 80 per cent, five 70 per cent, and only three below 50 per cent. The difference in averages of the two groups was 53 per cent.

In this connection it is interesting to note that before any measurements were taken, Miss Blanchard stated to me that her experience with classes in salesmanship and history of commerce led her to believe that the added asset in English words, acquired

by the study of Latin, was fully 50 per cent—within 3 per cent, you will perceive, of the actual difference found in No. 6.

In these six tests, the blundering and groping in the dark on the part of the non-Latin students would be ludicrous but for the tragedy of it all. For example, one pupil said of *concussion*: "An accident; leaves some people with a disease of the brain." A second gave this meaning of *resonant*: "To be firmly fixed in a certain resolution." Again, *potent* was explained as "something which hangs overhead; hence, a warning." By another, *militant* was defined as "a woman who destroys everything within her reach; a suffragette." Still another defined *intervention* as "an invention of something invented before"; and finally a youngster capped the climax by explaining *pendant* as "a Harvard-Yale game."

Last January, just before these measurements were made, I was visited by Mr. D. H. Fletcher of the Division of Education at Harvard, who asked the question why the drill in derivation should not be extended to the work of the college preparatory classes. Judging from the newspaper reports of the investigations of Mr. Castle as to the average college student's knowledge—or rather ignorance—of English, this question is peculiarly à propos at the present time. As things are now, however, the secondary-school Latin teacher has little time, even if he has the inclination, to go beyond the bare requirements for admission to college; but how would it do to have a new requirement in the derivation of English words from the Latin, optional, perhaps, with advanced Latin composition? In that case, pupils desiring to specialize in Latin in college—and I fear this number at present is painfully small—would of course offer the composition, while all pupils during the four years of the preparatory course would receive the inestimable advantage resulting from a thorough drill in English words.

But, to come back to the measurements. Of course, I do not claim that the case of Latin has been proved for all time. I do maintain, however, that the results show significantly which way the wind blows; and I hope a few years later, when we have many more commercial Latin pupils, to supplement these measurements with others more far-reaching, and, I trust, more conclusive—if possible, under the direction of Professor Holmes.

In conclusion, I will state with all frankness that teachers of Latin in secondary schools, with a few notable exceptions, believing themselves, no doubt, safely intrenched in the requirements for admission to college, and being naturally in sympathy with the cultural side of the classics, have as yet accorded my course little favor. Yet, let me ask you not to dismiss lightly the idea of vocational Latin, but, when opportunity offers, to speak the helpful word, for I make bold to express the hope that I am not only assisting boys and girls to an increased earning capacity in the stern struggle of life, but that I have also started a backfire which may help to check the conflagration at present threatening to sweep away so much of what for ages has been counted the highest and best in education.